

FOR MEMBERS OF PEARL RIVER VALLEY ELECTRIC POWER ASSOCIATION

TODAY

IN MISSISSIPPI

WARM
WINTER MEALS

J. OLIVE CO.

LEGISLATIVE
ISSUE

MISSISSIPPI

Sunrises & Sunsets

SOAK IN THE SUN'S
MAGNIFICENCE
IN SCENES CAPTURED BY READERS
FOR PICTURE THIS

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2020

Stand Strong

I'd like to open with a Happy New Year to everyone and also an energetic welcome to Mississippi's newly elected statewide officials and legislators.

It's an honor to bring you this year's first issue of *Today in Mississippi*, where we can share more about Mississippi's elected officials and national delegation who are vital to the success of our electric cooperatives, and ultimately to you, our members.

I invite you to read our interviews with Governor Tate Reeves, Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann and Speaker of the House of Representatives Philip Gunn in the following pages. They were eager to share with us their

goals for the coming years as well as encouraging words of support for Mississippi's electric cooperatives. We certainly look forward to working alongside each of them in the days ahead as we continue to ensure our co-ops are aligned for a strong, successful future.

The Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi, through our dedicated government relations team, also closely monitors legislation on the state and national level that is deemed important to our industry and that can impact our membership.

For example, December marked the passage of landmark legislation for the U.S. with the RURAL Act. This bipartisan legislation is a simple, one-page bill correcting an unintended problem created by the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This is important because it will continue to provide more than 900 electric cooperatives throughout the

country much-needed protection from losing their tax-exempt status if they had accepted government grants in 2018 or 2019 for disaster relief, broadband service or other viable programs such as investing in renewable energy. Without this law in place, numerous co-ops would have had to start paying significant amounts in taxes this spring; in turn, members' electricity rates

would have increased to cover those taxes.

Passing the national RURAL Act was a top legislative priority last year due to the profound and potential threat it posed to the fundamental business model of not-for-profit electric co-ops — including Mississippi's.

In fact, a large group of Mississippians actively joined with tens of thousands of other co-op leaders, employees and members from across the U.S. to advocate for this bill. It's important you know, too, that our entire Mississippi congressional delegation, both in the House and Senate, supported and voted for this legislation.

On behalf of the Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi, thank you to all who stand strong with us — the more than 785,000 members who rely on Mississippi's electric cooperatives for their power service. ❁



by Michael Callahan

*Executive Vice President/CEO
Electric Cooperatives
of Mississippi*

Farewell to a co-worker

It's with mixed emotions that I announced the retirement of a valuable team member, Mark Bridges. Mark joined the Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi in 1993 and loyally served as manager of support services and leader of our production team.



Lexie and Mark Bridges

Mark began his journey with print publications in 1978 when he joined me as a graphic artist for the *MFC News*, a regional farm supply cooperative newspaper. He later left to enter private business and then rejoined me at *Today in Mississippi* in 1993. We

have not only been team members, but close friends throughout our careers.

As manager of our production team, Mark's commitment to excellence and his artistic talent earned him recognition as one of the best graphic designers in the state. His optimistic attitude and strong work ethic kept our team from missing a deadline while producing tens of thousands of jobs throughout our time together. He was always available whenever someone had a last-minute project or an emergency arose.

The award-winning artist has been wonderful to work with — offering so many brilliant and creative ideas and suggestions. His vast knowledge of the cooperative industry and experience in the area of print production has been the foundation on which we have built and maintain the quality of this publication.

Mark possesses the cooperative spirit, working with others to accomplish a common goal and not worrying about who received the credit. He had a passion to make sure every printed piece was of the highest quality and met the established goals. Our cooperatives benefited from his contributions throughout his career.

People enjoyed working with Mark on special projects because they knew his distinctive touches would make a positive impact on their final product. They appreciated his thoughtful, steady approach to solving problems, large or small.

It has been an honor and a privilege to work with someone so passionate, loyal and professional, all at the same time. Mark is a wonderful person, great team member and I cherish our friendship.

Mark, on behalf of your *Today in Mississippi* family, we wish you and Lexie the best as you begin your retirement journey.

— Ron Stewart

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50-54	\$16.25	\$19.92	\$31.50	\$38.83	\$44.50	\$53.50	\$77.25	\$95.58
55-59	\$18.50	\$24.79	\$36.00	\$48.58	\$55.75	\$67.00	\$88.50	\$119.96
60-64	\$22.25	\$30.17	\$43.50	\$59.33	\$62.50	\$82.00	\$107.25	\$146.83
65-69	\$27.75	\$36.13	\$54.50	\$71.25	\$76.00	\$98.50	\$134.75	\$176.63
70-74	\$36.50	\$48.54	\$72.00	\$96.08	\$103.00	\$133.00	\$178.50	\$238.71

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*Ages 50 to 75 in NY. **In FL, policy is renewable until age 121.



Q&A with Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann



Q: What are the main duties of Lieutenant Governor, and how do you view your role in state government?

A: The Lieutenant Governor is in very close proximity to the budget and policy, so it is a pivotal role in terms of setting the state's priorities. He or she presides over the Senate, selects chairmen and chairwomen of committees and appoints various Mississippians to boards and commissions. I take these responsibilities very seriously, and I am grateful for the confidence Mississippians have instilled in me to do the job.

Q: What do you see as top priorities for the upcoming 2020 legislative session?

A: We have many challenges in Mississippi, including ensuring every child has access to a high quality education, shoring up our infrastructure, making healthcare more accessible and affordable, growing our economy and supporting our small businesses. At a minimum, we must ensure our teachers and other state employees, including our correctional officers and social workers, are fairly compensated at a level that creates more stability in state government.

Q: What major accomplishments are you proud of as Secretary of State?

A: When I ran for Secretary of State, one of my major goals was to make sure 16th Section land, which supports our public schools, was leased for fair market value as required by law. When we left office in January, we had raised \$1 billion for

public schools. I am really proud of this accomplishment.

We also revolutionized the process of starting a business in Mississippi by lowering filing fees and automating legal requirements, and launching our one-of-a-kind website, Y'all Business, www.yallbusiness.com. Providing free demographic and consumer information, Y'all Business helps economic developers sell their communities to new industry and allows entrepreneurs to gather free information to launch a successful business.

Finally, we made the security of our elections a priority by enacting a constitutional Voter ID law and dramatically increasing cybersecurity at the local and state levels. While other states are still defending lawsuits related to Voter ID, Mississippi's law remains effective and unchallenged in court.

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I am grateful for the confidence Mississippians have instilled in me to do the job.

Q: Electric power associations serve 1.8 million Mississippians. How important is the role of these associations?

A: Our electric power associations are providing electricity, a critical part of our economy and daily life, to more than half of the citizens of Mississippi. Every opportunity for economic development in your served area, now including broadband under the new law, begins with electric power associations. Furthermore, these associations carry out this role in a truly democratic way — through an organization that allows members and owners to weigh in on the operation. We look forward to working with our electric power associations in the coming years. ❁

Q&A with Speaker of the House Philip Gunn



Q: What are some of the major accomplishments during your time as Speaker of the House of Representatives?

A: Over the last eight years, the Republican-led legislature has:

- Put forth a Road and Bridge Plan that will invest between \$120-150 million into roads and bridges every year from now on. This plan took money that we already have and rededicated it to Mississippi's roads and bridges. Cities and counties now have a continuing source of revenue to maintain progress in fixing our roads and bridges. In addition, we've injected an additional \$250 million into local bridges to address immediate problems.
- Passed SB2347, commonly known as the "Third Grade Reading Gate." Before this measure, our students were only reading at a 69 percent grade level. Today, the grade level exceeds 90 percent. We have done more to improve reading in Mississippi than has ever been done before. Overall, we've increased the amount of education funding over \$2.5 billion – the most in the history of our state. Just to name one of the many benefits of this funding, graduation rates have increased by 11 percent, putting Mississippi at the national average.
- Balanced the state's budget. We pledged to not spend more money than you give us and will continue to do so. Because of this, we've had to make some tough decisions; but by following this conservative approach, Mississippi today is in the best financial condition it has seen in years. We now have a balanced budget, have fixed retirement and have given pay raises to both state employees and teachers. The Republican-led legislature has been good stewards of your money, and tax cuts have not affected our ability to run this state.
- Passed the most comprehensive Anti-Human Trafficking legislation in the country with HB571. This bill has been called model legislation for other states to follow by the most reputable advocacy organization in the United States.

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In the 2020 legislative session, the goal of the Mississippi House of Representatives is to continue to build on these past achievements and to push the needle forward, as far as we can, in order to make Mississippi the best it can be for all the people of this great state.

Q: What are some key issues in the 2020 legislative session?

A: A few priorities will be to focus on workforce development and Brain Drain, we also have funding of K-12 and community colleges tied up in that, which circles back to job creation – which I believe is a top priority for many Mississippians. Other issues on the horizon include various healthcare issues that need to be addressed, education, infrastructure and MDOC among others.

Q: What are your legislative priorities for this session?

A: In the 2020 legislative session, the goal of the Mississippi House of Representatives is to continue to build on these past achievements and to push the needle forward, as far as we can, in order to make Mississippi the best it can be for all the people of this great state.

Q: Electric cooperatives serve 1.8 million Mississippians. How important is the role of these associations?

A: The importance of Mississippi's electric power associations cannot be overstated. I have been privileged to observe firsthand how they meet the needs of their customers. I witnessed how these cooperatives handled the fallout from Hurricane Katrina, the greatest natural disaster our state has ever seen, and from various ice storms and tornados that have struck the region over the years. In each situation, these associations responded with speed and efficiency to restore service while at the same time demonstrating real compassion and concern for the plight of their customers. We are extremely fortunate, indeed, to have such quality people serve in our state's electric power associations. 🌿

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Electric Cooperatives

A partner and trusted source for members

Electric cooperative members across the country are increasingly satisfied with the performance of their electric co-ops — and more than ever before see them as trusted sources for information on keeping their energy costs low. These are among the key findings of a recent national survey commissioned by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the national trade association representing more than 900 electric cooperatives, including those in Mississippi.

The survey found increased satisfaction over 2018 numbers from respondents who say their electric co-op keeps them informed about its actions (84 percent) and is a trusted source for information about energy use and devices, including solar energy (83 percent). It also recorded an increase from 2018 in co-op members who say their electric co-op is a partner in understanding energy technologies and controlling energy costs (83 percent).

“We hear a lot of stories about how Americans are losing faith in institutions like big companies and government, but

that’s clearly not the case with electric cooperatives,” said NRECA Communications Senior Vice President Scott Peterson. “The positive view that members have of [electric] co-ops is a testament to their reputation as honest brokers and entities who truly care about their communities.”

Other data shows electric co-ops holding steady with prior surveys on overall job performance (93 percent positive), providing reliable electric service (95 percent positive) and quickly restoring power after outages (92 percent positive).

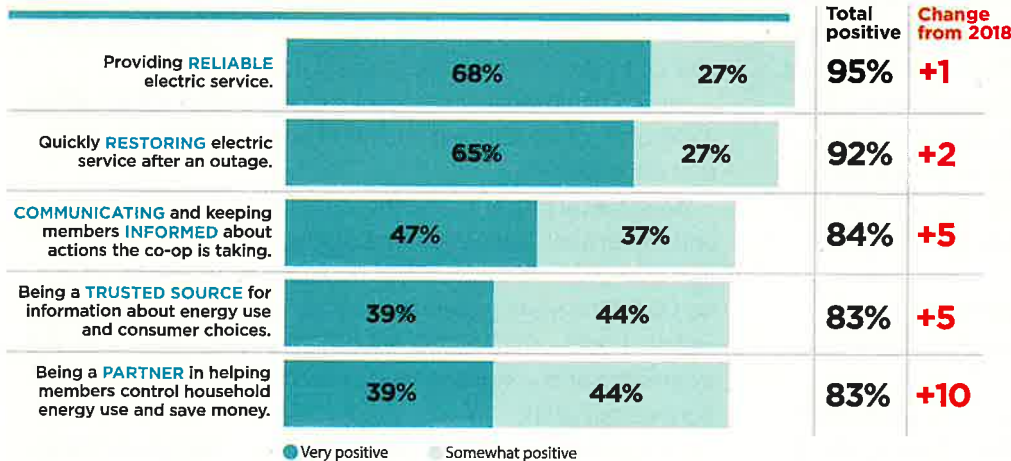
More than half (56 percent) of the co-op members who responded said their electric bills are “about right” or “a bit low” versus 41 percent who say their bills are “too high.”

Electric co-ops care about the local communities they serve and want to be the trusted energy source for their members. If you have questions about your energy use or ways you can make your home more efficient to save money on your energy bills, contact your electric co-op — they’re ready to help! 🌱

Members have a **high opinion** of their co-op

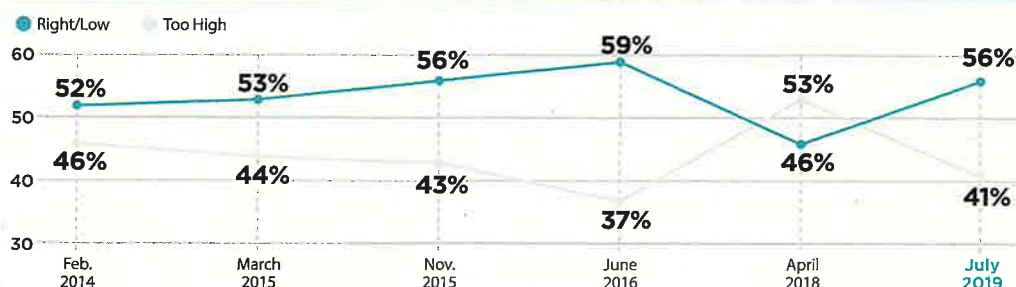
Co-op performance on specific traits

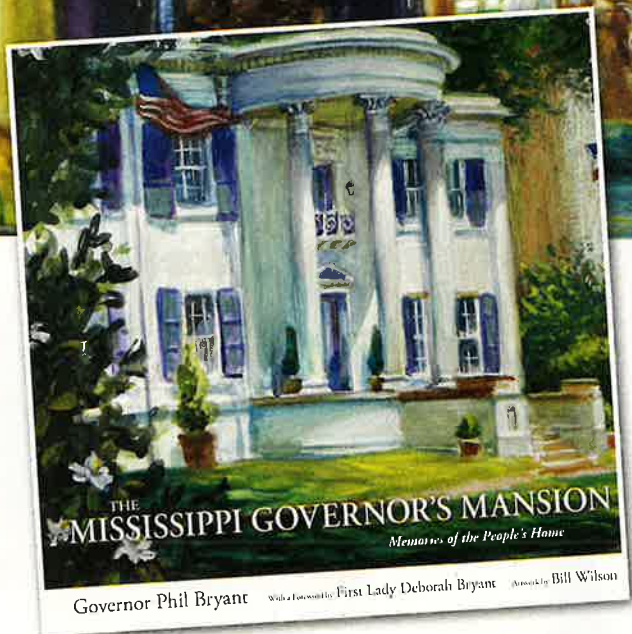
Consumer-members give co-ops high marks across the board for performance but registered their highest satisfaction ever with co-ops being a “partner” in controlling energy use.



Perception of electric rates

More than half of survey respondents said their co-op's rates are “about right” or “a bit low.”





MISSISSIPPI'S MANSION of MEMORIES

Welcoming its first executive in 1842, the Mississippi Governor's Mansion is the second-oldest continuously occupied governor's residence in the United States. The Mansion is both a public building open for tours and the private residence of the governor and his family. In this unique book, readers are invited to explore the entirety of the building, from the attic to the garage and everything in between.



The Mississippi Governor's Mansion: Memories of the People's Home is the first book of its kind dedicated to images and stories about the Governor's Mansion.

The volume reveals Governor Phil Bryant's profound respect for the office he holds and his deep appreciation for the National Historic Landmark in which he resides. Through his personal, often touching, reflections, Governor Bryant pays tribute to former governors, their families

and the many public servants who have dedicated their lives to taking care of this beautiful Greek Revival masterpiece.



More than 60 elegant watercolor paintings by noted Mississippi artist Bill Wilson accompany the governor's stories. Wilson captures the beauty and majesty of the home, its furnishings and the restored historic grounds. The volume also features a personal foreword by First Lady Deborah Bryant inviting readers into the home, an artist's statement by Wilson and a brief historical essay written by Mansion curator Megan Bankston. 🌿

Published in November 2019 by University Press of Mississippi, the hardcover book retails for \$35 and may be purchased at www.upress.state.ms.us/Books/T/The-Mississippi-Governor-s-Mansion or by calling 1-800-737-7788.

These experiences are what prompted the James family to open their own specialty olive oil store so that other Mississippians could also enjoy, have access to and learn more about them. "And J. Olive Co. was born," Lee shared, adding that the 'J.' represents the James family name.

Their flagship J. Olive Co. store was launched in Ridgeland in August 2014. Since that time, the brand has expanded into two more physical locations, in Hattiesburg and Oxford, and a convenient website.

Olive Oil

"All of our oils are 100 percent natural, non-GMO and gluten free," Lee noted. "It is literally fresh olive juice. Other oils cannot make that claim."

Extra Virgin Olive Oil, or EVOO, describes the pure oil produced from first press of an olive. It is the result of harvesting fresh green olives, crushing within 2 to 4 hours of harvest and maintaining an optimal temperature of 69 degrees or less at crush. These factors create an olive oil with exceptional freshness and quality, which lead to improved health benefits. Once anything is added to an EVOO, even simply infusing it with natural herbs or fruit, it is no longer labeled EVOO.

As J. Olive Co. procures the freshest olive oils from across the globe, this means that harvest timing of olives is crucial. "We call it chasing the crush," he said, "because in olive oil, freshness trumps everything." The family imports its pristine olive oils from countries in the Northern Hemisphere, such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and the state of California, as well as Southern Hemisphere regions of Argentina, Australia, Chile, Peru and South Africa.

The company's high standards for EVOO surpass those set by the International Olive Oil Council and FDA. "Grocery stores will often carry 'pure olive oil' or 'fresh olive oil' — these are just ways of branding a substandard olive oil that did not even meet the lax standards to be considered an Extra Virgin Olive Oil," Lee explained. "Often, they have been found to be blended with sunflower or another type of oil."

A popular product with J. Olive Co. customers is fused and infused olive oils, which are naturally flavored and include such options as basil, blood orange, butter, chipotle, garlic, lemon, rosemary and Tuscan herb, where the oils are flavored during the crush stage. "For example," he shared, "lemons are thrown in with the olives at the crush to make the fused lemon olive oil."

One question J. Olive Co. staff is often asked is if olive oil can be used as a substitute for butter in cooking or baking. "Absolutely," Lee confirmed. "Our butter flavored olive oil allows you to get the taste of butter on everything, from

oatmeal at breakfast to spritzed over popcorn, without the guilt of using butter."

J. Olive Co. EVOO provides harvest dates on all bottles, as consumption is recommended within one year of that date.

Health

Health benefits unique to a high quality EVOO are numerous. First, it is high in monounsaturated fat, which is considered a good fat, and is noted to improve blood sugar levels, lower belly fat and potentially prevent cognitive decline often associated with aging and Alzheimer's. It also is low in saturated fat, contains vitamin E, increases calcium absorption to promote healthy bones, has anti-inflammatory properties that can help relieve arthritis pain and boosts the immune system.

"Perhaps the most significant health benefit of a quality EVOO, such that is found at J. Olive Co., is the presence of a significant polyphenol level in the oils," Lee said. "Polyphenols work as antioxidants to protect the cells in our bodies

from damage from cancer causing free radicals. A diet high in polyphenols has been shown to lower the risk of heart disease by decreasing certain inflammatory factors, reducing the risk of blood clotting, improving the lining of arteries, increasing blood flow and circulation and decreasing blood pressure and cholesterol levels."



Photos by J. Olive Co.

Wild Rice with Feta and Pecans

INGREDIENTS

- 2 (6-ounce) boxes of long grain and wild rice mix
- ½ red onion, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- ½ cup J. Olive Co. EVOO
- ½ cup chopped pecans, toasted
- 4 tablespoons J. Olive Co. Cranberry-Pear Balsamic Vinegar
- ⅓ cup dried cranberries
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese

Cook rice according to package directions and set aside to cool. When cooled, stir in onion, red pepper, yellow pepper, olive oil, pecans, balsamic vinegar and cranberries. Stir well, and then carefully fold in the feta cheese. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

 for the love of the game

A FAMILY TRADITION

SPANS ACROSS THE SEC FOOTBALL LANDSCAPE

Not many football fathers have the chance to witness an eight-year journey across the SEC football landscape as M. Ray "Hoppy" Cole has. He was a three-year letterman at Ole Miss while son Mitt would later play at LSU and son Drew at Auburn. Hoppy's two great highlights are of his sons winning national championship rings. Mitt won his title with LSU in 2007 while Drew won his at Auburn in 2010. The elder Cole was not left out totally, as he does have some hardware from helping lead Pascagoula to the Big 8 state championship in 1976.

"I used to kid with them and say, 'When you play on Saturday, you can talk trash,'" Hoppy said. Well, Mitt and Drew reversed it on him as then now can laughingly say, "When you play on Monday, you can talk trash, dad."

Hoppy is a bank president and CEO of The First in Hattiesburg. The Pascagoula native's first taste of football came early. He grew up an Ole Miss fan because of his older neighbor, Allen Bush. Bush signed with Coach Johnny Vaught's powerhouse and played for the Rebels from 1965-67. "My dad took an old bus and made it into a camper," Hoppy said. "He did it because every Saturday we were following Ole Miss and Bush around." Hoppy remembers riding in that overhauled bus all the way to El Paso to see Ole Miss play. Hoppy later followed in Bush's foot steps to Pascagoula High and then to Ole Miss. Unfortunately for Hoppy, in his three varsity seasons in Oxford under Steve Sloan, the Rebels were not very productive. Even so, he said, "We had some great moments. We beat State twice and whipped USM. I also played with and against some of the greatest in SEC history."

Mitt started his high school playing career at South Jones High School in Ellisville. Midway through his junior year, his dad was in the midst of helping start up a new bank, and the job called for relocating the family to Picayune. Mitt, a 6-4, 265-pound tight end, had already attracted college attention. Coaches were making comments like, "Who is that big kid that can run?"



Drew, Hoppy and Mitt Cole

"I grew up an Ole Miss fan," stated Mitt. "My final two choices came down to LSU and Ole Miss. It really came down to that I wanted to play for Nick Saban." After Mitt's second year, Saban was hired away by the Miami Dolphins. In came Les Miles to coach the Tigers. In the final game of Mitt's career, he helped the Tigers win their first National Championship since 1958. "We beat Ohio State in the Superdome for the title. Nothing like that feeling," Mitt reminisced. Mitt also works for The First.

Drew was a tagalong to college camps with Mitt since he was four years younger. Drew, who was a running back and defensive back in high school, ran a 4.39 40-yard dash. He became very close to the LSU and Auburn coaching staffs. They stayed in touch, and in the end Drew chose Auburn over LSU and Ole Miss. "I grew up an Ole Miss fan until Mitt went to LSU," stated Drew. "Dad never put any pressure on us to sign with any particular school. Coaches come and go, so it should be all about the school. I was going to play defensive back in college, so to me on the football side was all about the defensive schemes the teams were running." During his junior season, the Tigers beat Oregon for the national title. Drew works for Laurel's Sanderson Farms. 



by Dale McKee

Dale McKee is a Waynesboro resident who has been writing about sports in Mississippi since 1973.

Quickly slice bacon into matchsticks. (Tip: If you fold each bacon strip in half lengthwise, twice, you can slice the six layers of bacon at once. Repeat for each strip.) Add bacon to skillet and crisp the bacon matchsticks. Remove to a paper towel to use later.

In a large soup or stock pot, whisk the chicken stock into the cup of water over low heat until fully blended. Add the butter and half of the cream and continue to whisk over medium heat. Remove mixture from heat.

Peel the sweet potatoes' skins off with two forks or use heat resistant gloves to get the job done. (Keep in mind that the steam inside the potato will be hot!) Add the sweet potato "meat" to the soup pot with water mixture. Add half the bacon to the soup pot as well.

Strip the thyme leaves from the stem and add most of the leaves (reserving a few for garnish), nutmeg and cinnamon.

Break apart the potato pieces with a wooden spoon or whisk and stir mixture to begin combining ingredients.

At our house, we call the immersion blender the "boat motor." It's a fabulous tool to use in this case because it will minimize cleanup later because the "blending" can happen in the original soup pot. Alternately, you can transfer the ingredients in a couple of "batches" into a large hot food-friendly blender and then stir the batches back together well before serving. Either way, blend the ingredients until the soup is "whipped" — creamy, smooth, velvety. It's best to remove the soup from heat during blending.

Once blended, add the other half of the cream and milk to the soup slowly. If you need to add a little more milk or cream to help it come to a perfect texture, go for it.

Your soup should be soup, not mashed potatoes; plus, it's a fact that you can't have too much cream, bacon or sweet potatoes in any recipe.

Once you've gotten the soup silky smooth, bring the pot back to the stove on low-medium heat. Continue stirring until it's piping hot. If the soup thickens up too much at this point, thin it with chicken stock. If it's too thin, simmer it longer to reduce it down slightly. This is a very forgiving recipe — which is part of its magic and ease.

We like to serve this soup garnished with a crumble of the reserved bacon and a pinch of fresh thyme. As I mentioned earlier, this is a crowd-pleasing dish, so invite some neighbors over to enjoy this with you or really make someone's day by taking it over to someone else's home who needs a bright spot on a gloomy winter day. Pack the soup in one container and the fresh thyme and bacon crumbles separately. Garnish all the bowls after it's back up to serving temperature. Everyone eats with their eyes, so dress it up with a sprinkle of that bacon and something green and folks will think you just invented soup and won winter. ❁

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chef Andy Chapman lives in Gulfport where he owns and operates Eat Y'all, a business that helps farmers and food producers connect to chefs around the globe who are looking for better ingredients. Andy would love to hear how your turkey turns out. Contact him at andy@eatyall.com or 601-852-3463.



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Brussel Sprout Quinoa Salad

INGREDIENTS

1 pound Brussel sprouts, halved
3 cups butternut squash, cubed evenly
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup dry quinoa
1 medium pomegranate, deseeded
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecans, chopped
Olive oil spray

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place Brussel sprouts on one side of the pan and butternut squash on the other side, or you can use two pans. Spritz vegetables with olive oil. Bake for 25 minutes; remove Brussels sprouts and place into a large bowl. Return squash to the oven if not yet tender and bake 10 to 15 more minutes. Add to the bowl with Brussel sprouts. While the vegetables are baking, cook quinoa according to directions. In the large bowl with the vegetables, add cooked quinoa, pomegranate seeds and pecans. Stir to combine. Serve warm.



Tip: Save time and purchase pre-cut butternut squash, microwavable quinoa pouches and pomegranate seeds.

Pomegranate and Pear Salad

INGREDIENTS

1 pear, thinly sliced
3 cups spinach
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup pomegranate seeds
 $\frac{1}{8}$ cup pecans
 $\frac{1}{8}$ cup blue cheese
2 tablespoons sherry vinaigrette

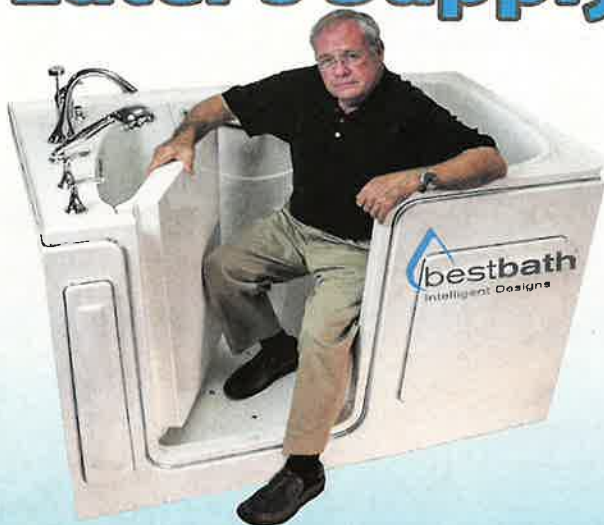
Layer ingredients into a bowl or on a plate. Add dressing when ready to eat. This recipe yields one serving, so make several salads at once. Pair with a lean protein for an easy weekday lunch or convenient weeknight meal. ✨

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rebecca Turner is an author, registered dietitian, radio host, television presenter and a certified specialist in sports dietetics with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. A lifelong Mississippian, she has spent the last decade offering no-nonsense nutrition guidance that allows you to enjoy good health and good food. Her book, "Mind Over Fork," challenges the way you think, not the way you eat. Find her on social media and online at www.theRebeccaTurner.com.

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MY HOMETOWN HAS CHANGED

At one of our daily board meetings, Mr. Roy said, "I am so proud of the way Lucedale has changed in the past few years. Have you noticed how busy Main Street is now?" I said, "Yes, and all of the once vacant stores have been renovated and filled with little shops. It's wonderful. And not only that, many of the old houses have been refurbished, and that really makes me proud."

Mr. Roy is a native of our hometown, and I moved here when I was 12 years old. After we married, we moved away for approximately 10 years, but returned to live and raise our children in this little town. We have discussed our decision many times, and we both agree that we are glad we returned.

Lucedale, like most small towns in Mississippi, went through a period of change during the 1970s, 1980s and most of the 1990s. Downtown, and especially Main Street, almost died. Stores closed and business moved to the suburbs. My little town struggled to survive. I have previously discussed the book that Mr. Roy and our good friend Dayton Whites wrote entitled, "The Best Little Town." The book describes Lucedale during 1945 to 1950. Main Street was busy, as were most Main Streets in small towns in Mississippi. The book gives this description: In 1948, Lucedale had a respectable shopping area, and most all professional services needed were available. The town had five dry goods stores, seven grocery stores, three drug stores, two hardware stores, one variety store and six new car dealerships. In addition, there were five restaurants, four hotels, three movie theaters, one pool hall, a bowling alley, a gift shop and one bank. Today, downtown Lucedale is a far cry from the way it was in the 1940s and 1950s.

Approximately eight years ago, Lucedale began a process of metamorphosis. Today, Main Street is once again busy and bustling with people and cars. But there is one big difference; most of the businesses are antique stores and specialty shops. All of the storefronts have been refurbished to fit each store's new identity, but all still retain their original character.

To better understand what enabled this revitalization, I met with the town's mayor, Darwin Nelson, and also Russell Evans, owner of a local real estate firm and active in the Downtown Merchant's Association. Mayor Nelson is a dynamic leader and always anxious to talk about Lucedale. He told me that he believes a key to getting the city busy again is attracting visitors to the city. An example of this is the Second Saturday event that is held each month from March through September. At 5 p.m., Main Street is closed to

traffic, vendors set up food sales and all businesses are open for visitors. These events attract more and more people. I asked him what other events the city promotes. He said, "Miss Kay, we will sponsor or encourage any event that will attract visitors to our town. If a doughnut-eating contest will get visitors to come, we'll promote it. Our Christmas Parade is the second largest in Mississippi. I tell people that Lucedale is a regional attraction. Just walk down Main Street today and notice where the cars are from."

I thanked Mayor Nelson for his help and headed to see Russell Evans to get his thoughts. Mr. Evans agreed with the Mayor's opinions, but added one comment. Several investors with adequate capital and a love for Lucedale were responsible for purchasing many of the old buildings, renovating them and renting space to the right kind of businesses. Without their help, revitalization of downtown might not have happened.

The changes to "This Best Little Town" required the efforts of many individuals and groups, including a forward thinking Mayor and City Board, investors with adequate capital, an energetic downtown merchants association and entrepreneurs with a vision.

You are invited to come see for yourselves. 



by Kay Grafe

Contact Kay Grafe at kaygrafe@bellsouth.net.

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FIRST MAN STANDING



Ephraim Woods' grave is a testament to his undying belief in the promised Day of Resurrection — a testimony that has long since outlived his physical life on earth. Photos by Walt Grayson.

I'm not sure the name of the little cemetery across the road from Red Lick Baptist Church in Jefferson County. It may belong to the church, or it may be an old family plot. But whichever, it was recently cleaned up by a bunch of cousins who are descendants of one of the long-time occupants, Ephraim Woods. He died back in the 1880s, I think. I'm trying to remember if that's what Margaret Woods Collins from Madison, Ephraim's great-granddaughter, told me. He has no headstone, so I couldn't read it anywhere for myself. And, I forgot to write down what Margaret said.

But no matter. Even without a headstone, Ephraim's grave is by far the easiest in the cemetery to find. It is shaped like a head-high Indian Mound — because Ephraim is buried standing up.

Why did he want such an odd burial? Well according to Margaret, her great-granddad was a very religious person and wanted to be able to step directly out of his grave on Resurrection Day and look his maker squarely in the face. A little eccentric, perhaps. Another cousin, J.W. Woods from Pearl River County, says he thinks his great granddad was just some kind of a weirdo.

Perhaps. But if it ends up that Ephraim is the first man standing and lends a helping hand to others struggling to climb out on That Day, then we'll know he had the right idea all along.

Over the years, lots of people have tried to find the grave of the man standing up at Red Lick. Until the cousins chopped the cemetery out of the wilderness a few weeks ago, the cemetery itself was hard enough to find — much less the up-standing grave.

“

I suppose a curious grave like that is enough of an oddity that folks would want to see it for themselves.

I suppose a curious grave like that is enough of an oddity that folks would want to see it for themselves. I did a TV story about it. So, obviously I wanted to go see it.

If you ever want to find it, the best way to do so is stop by the Old Country Store at Lorman and ask my “go to” buddy, “Mr. D.,” how to get there. And go hungry enough to eat some of his “Best Fried Chicken in the

World” while you are there. His chicken is almost good enough to raise the dead, itself. ✖



by Walt Grayson

Walt Grayson is the host of “Mississippi Roads” on Mississippi Public Broadcasting television and the author of two “Looking Around Mississippi” books and “Oh! That Reminds Me: More Mississippi Homegrown Stories.” Contact him at walt@waltgrayson.com.